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REPORT
101-109

LECHUGUILLA CAVE STUDY ACT OF 1989

AUGUST 30, 1989.—Ordered to be printed

Filed under authority of the order of the Senate of August 2 (legislative day, January 3), 1989

Mr. JOHNSTON, from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany S. 558]

The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, to which was referred the bill (S. 558) to authorize a study on methods to protect and interpret the internationally significant Lechuguilla Cave at Carlsbad Caverns National Park in the State of New Mexico, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment and an amendment to the title and recommends that the bill, as amended, do pass.

The amendments are as follows:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert in lieu thereof the following:

SECTION 1. This Act shall be cited as the "Lechuguilla Cave Study Act of 1989".

SEC. 2. The Congress finds that—

(a) International attention has been focused on the outstanding cave resources of Carlsbad Caverns National Park by recent explorations of Lechuguilla Cave;

(b) The recent explorations of Lechuguilla Cave have exposed spectacular wonders and revealed Lechuguilla Cave to be a world-class cave that is the longest deep cave and the second-deepest cave in the United States, is at least 36 miles long, and is filled with unique and awe-inspiring gypsum formations, and have caused organizations such as the National Speleological Society to describe Lechuguilla Cave as possibly the finest cave in America; and

(c) Broad public interest has developed over methods to manage Lechuguilla Cave and other resources of Carlsbad Caverns National Park and to facilitate greater public enjoyment of park resources.

SEC. 3. (a) In recognition of the international significance of Lechuguilla Cave and other resources of Carlsbad Caverns National Park and the need for careful consideration of future management options, the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Director of the National Park Service, is authorized and directed to revise the

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existing general management plan for Carlsbad Caverns National Park to include a study of the most appropriate ways to protect and interpret Lechuguilla Cave. The revision of the plan shall also include an evaluation of methods to facilitate greater enjoyment of other caves within the park by the public.

(b) Not later than two years from the date that funds are made available for the revision referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary shall submit the revision to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the United States Senate and the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the United States House of Representatives.

SEC. 4. There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act.

Amend the title so as to read:

An Act to revise the general management plan for Carlsbad Caverns National Park to study methods to protect and interpret the internationally significant Lechuguilla Cave, and for other purposes.

PURPOSE OF THE MEASURE

The purpose of S. 558, as ordered reported, is to revise the general management plan for Carlsbad Caverns National Park to study methods to protect and interpret the internationally significant Lechuguilla Cave.

BACKGROUND AND NEED

While the existence of Lechuguilla Cave has been known for over 75 years, for most of that time it was considered to be another minor cave within Carlsbad Caverns National Park. Recent explorations of Lechuguilla Cave, however, have revealed that the cave is far more significant. Researchers now know that Lechuguilla is at least 1,500 feet deep and over 36 miles long, making it the second deepest and one of the longest caves in the United States.

Lechuguilla is also filled with interesting speleological formations, such as 15-foot long gypsum crystal "chandeliers," delicate gypsum "flowers," cave pearls, "popcorn," and large "soda straws." The exploration of Lechuguilla Cave has attracted international attention and has been described by the National Speleological Society as possibly the finest cave in America.

Lechuguilla Cave also offers the opportunity for broad scientific research and discovery. The speleogenesis of Lechuguilla and other caves in the Guadalupe escarpment is very unusual because of the unique morphology of the caves. These caves do not fit the form and pattern of previously studied caves in more humid regions of North America. Cave temperatures, air movements, and passage development in the cave present an opportunity to study the cave formation process as it is actually ongoing.

Because of the significance of Lechuguilla Cave, questions have arisen as to the appropriate management of the cave and the proper protection of resources.

SUMMARY OF THE MEASURE

S. 558, directs the Secretary of the Interior to revise the existing general management plan for Carlsbad Caverns National Park to study the most appropriate way to protect and interpret Lechuguilla Cave. The revision of the plan will also include an evaluation of methods to facilitate greater enjoyment of other caves within the park. The Secretary shall submit the revision of the

plan to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate and the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the House of Representatives within 2 years from the date that funds are made available.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

S. 558 was introduced by Senators Domenici and Bingaman on March 9, 1989. The Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests held a hearing on S. 558 on June 21, 1989.

At the business meeting on August 2, 1989, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources ordered S. 558, as amended, favorably reported.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND TABULATION OF VOTES

The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, in open business session on August 2, 1989, by unanimous vote of a quorum present, recommends that the Senate pass S. 558 if amended, as described herein.

The rollcall vote on reporting the measure was 19 yeas, 0 nays, as follows:

YEAS	NAYS
Mr. Johnston	
Mr. Bumpers	
Mr. Ford	
Mr. Metzenbaum*	
Mr. Bradley	
Mr. Bingaman*	
Mr. Wirth	
Mr. Conrad	
Mr. Heflin	
Mr. Rockefeller	
Mr. McClure	
Mr. Hatfield	
Mr. Domenici	
Mr. Wallop	
Mr. Murkowski	
Mr. Nickles	
Mr. Burns	
Mr. Garn	
Mr. McConnell*	

* Indicates voted by proxy.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

During the consideration of S. 558, the Committee adopted an amendment in the nature of a substitute, and an amendment to the title to reflect the changes made in the substitute.

The original text of S. 558 directed the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Director of the National Park Service, to conduct a study of the most appropriate way to protect and interpret Lechuguilla Cave. The Committee amended the bill to direct the Secretary to incorporate a study of the cave into a revision of the general management plan for Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

Such a revision would allow the Park Service to better integrate the management and protection of Lechuguilla with that of other resources in the park. The Committee understands that the current management plan for the park was prepared in 1975 and should be revised in the near future.

COST AND BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS

The Congressional Budget Office estimate of the costs of this measure has been requested but was not received at the time the report was filed. When the report is available, the Chairman will request it to be printed in the Congressional Record for the advice of the Senate.

REGULATORY IMPACT EVALUATION

In compliance with paragraph 11(b) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee makes the following evaluation of the regulatory impact which would be incurred in carrying out S. 558. The bill is not a regulatory measure in the sense of imposing Government-established standards or significant economic responsibilities on private individuals and businesses.

No personal information would be collected in administering the program. Therefore, there would be no impact of personal privacy.

Little, if any, additional paperwork would result from the enactment of S. 558, as reported.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

On June 7, 1989, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources requested legislative reports from the Department of the Interior and the Office of Management and Budget setting forth executive views on S. 558. These reports had not been received at the time the report on S. 558 was filed. When the reports become available, the chairman will request that they be printed in the Congressional Record for the advice of the Senate. The testimony provided by the appropriate agency at the Subcommittee hearing follows:

STATEMENT OF GERALD D. PATTEN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate this opportunity to provide your Subcommittee with testimony on S. 558, a bill to study protection and interpretation of Lechuguilla Cave at Carlsbad Caverns National Park, and on S. 855, a bill to study, and establish, a cave research institute at Carlsbad Caverns National Park.

Mr. Chairman, the study proposed in S. 558 requires no additional authority, and will be completed as funding becomes available. The National Park Service would not object if Congress chooses to enact a specific authorization for this study; however, we do not intend to request additional funding. We estimate the cost of the study proposed in S. 558 to be $100,000.

Mr. Chairman, we oppose enactment of S. 855. Conducting cave research on non-park resources and creating a large scale repository of scientific data on cave geology and speology are not appropriate Park Service functions and would not be a high priority for the use of Park Service funds. There is already authority under existing law for Park Service staff to conduct such in-park research as may be necessary to protect cave resources managed by the National Park Service.

Although the existence of Lechuguilla Cave has been known for many years, only during the past 4 years have National Park Service staff, cave explorers, and researchers progressively become aware of the wonders and size of the cave. We now know that the cave contains a wide variety of speleothems, including the largest known collection of hydromagnesite balloons in the park, and the cave is one of 4 caves in the United States and one of very few in the world to have these rare features. Lechuguilla appears to have the best display of gypsum speleothems in the world and includes such features as gypsum flowers, crusts, cave cotton, strands, needles, thick gypsum beds and large crystals oriented to wind directions. Lechuguilla Cave is the longest deep cave known in the United States and is the second deepest cave in the United States. At over 36 miles, it is the 7th longest cave in the United States.

Lechuguilla Cave offers the opportunity for broad scientific research and discovery. The speleogenesis of Lechuguilla Cave and others in the Guadalupe escarpment are very unusual because of the unique morphology of the cave—they don't fit the form and pattern of previously studied caves in more humid regions of North America. Cave temperatures, air movements, and passage development by the presence of water in the cave present an opportunity to study an exotic resource where the cave formation process is actually ongoing.

National Park Service staff and researchers have equated the evolving data on the cave with the discovery of a whole new park previously not known to exist. Extensive new speleogenesic data may result for deep cave research.

Carlsbad Caverns National Park is situated in Eddy County in southeastern New Mexico and extends 21 miles along the Guadalupe Ridge/Escarpment. The park contains a segment of a Permian barrier reef, one of the world's largest fossil reefs, within which has developed an extensive cavern system with countless magnificent and curious formations. Over 300 caves are known to exist in the reef including 75 indentified in Carlsbad Caverns National Park and 22 caves in nearby Guadalupe Mountains National Park. The park was established to preserve and make available to the public some of the world's largest and most beautiful limestone caverns. Carlsbad Cavern is the largest of the parks known caves and is profusely decorated with speleothems.

Cave resources of the Carlsbad area offer outstanding educational, interpretive, and research opportunities and support a major tourism economy for the area. In 1988, over 786,000 people visited Carlsbad Caverns and more than 500,000 went through the main cavern.

The magnitude of cave resources and multiple research opportunities makes Carlsbad Caverns National Park an excellent location for a cave research institute. The park staff are in the forefront of current cave research and cave researchers view the Captain Reef area as an outstanding area for learning about cave geology and how caves form. There is evidence that additional research in Lechuguilla Cave may reveal unknown information about how caves are formed and this cave offers a rare opportunity to study cave speleogenesis.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared comments. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee notes that no changes in existing law are made by the bill S. 558, as reported.

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